CAT lecture

1/20
History of Artists' Use of Film - Chuck Kleinhans

Cinema was one of the first modern arts to be based in a new technological apparatus: photochemical, mechanical, and optical. While rapidly expanding into the commercial entertainment market, cinema was also of great interest to artists seeking new possibilities for expression and communication. This discussion will highlight some moments in the 1920s of intense radical aesthetic and social activity in media arts, and its continuation later in the 20th century. My central thesis is that new forms do not simply arise from innovative technological possibilities or ahistorical stylistic evolution, but often emerges from the needs and demands of new social groups for expressive forms to deal with their social/political/historical reality. Work by Maholy-Nagy, Richter, Vertov, and recent work by feminist, gay, and African American artists.

Reading:
Murray Smith, "Modernism and the avant-gardes," The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church-Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp 395-412.

intro:
Smith on A-g--useful background and overview.

Here--specific question: relation of art and technology.
how do we understand that relation? esp. historically

dominant assumption: technology leads, determines, dictates
thus often a history of innovation in dominant film studies, but also in experimental
thus: panchromatic film, color, sound, video, new delivery systems, etc.
e.g., change from b&w to color reversal to color neg; etc.

Experimental within the art world:
1. mass reproduced, no unique object (unlike painting)
2. what are you selling? renting seats for a theatre, or multiple reproductions (home video/CD/DVD)
3. the construction of the field of experimental film--largely as an internal, formal, development. Classic example: P. Adam Sitney, Visionary Film.
from art history--sequential working out of formal problems
(much like literature--Bloom)

But : other models
Bourdieu, Field of experimental, how it develops sociologically

examples:

1920s:

Richter   painting, in motion

Maholy-Nagy
plan for a film (note idea of excitement)

Vertov: TMWAMC--the city, work, film as industrial process, explanation, Russian Formalist idea of showing the device (anti-naturalism)
Brecht--distanciation, vs. Aristotelian absorption....instead, awareness

actual events--Richter: , Ghosts before Breakfast

 various identity politics movements:

black, feminist, gay--e.g., AIDS media

new issues, Varda, ecology, recycling, consumption, etc.
Gleaners (for small handheld digital)

Postmodernism

modernism
l. vs. eclecticism, for the clean, machine age,
Bauhaus, form follows function
2. novelty and originality, always avant garde
3. reject decoration, ornament; for geometric,
clear
4. vs. national, regional, vernacular, for the
international and cosmopolitan
5. art of the future--would affect society (but fundamentally
elitist--intellectuals will decide)
example: Le Courbusier housing blocks; NU Library
(Netsch)

postmod
characteristics:
l. plurality of styles, hybrid, eclecticism
2. recycling of styles, "retro style"; quotations,
collage, parody, pastiche
3. ornament and decoration
4. mix high and low culture, assumes various
 responses from general public and those "in the know" [a
kind of irony] but makes work accessible to both
5. concern with meaning, statement (art can
communicate, this should be a concern of the artist)
6. "intertextuality" constant reference to the world of art, of
media itself, as an artificial but real part of existence. Art and discourse structure
the way we understand the world of "the Real". Out there is in here.

POEMS THAT GO

http://www.poemsthatgo.com/

INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER
(compare: Liberation News Service, underground press 60s-70s)

http://www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml